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Managing the invisible learner: Causes and strategies

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

The study sought to explore teacher strategies and classroom management practices in addressing student absenteeism, as well as the underlying reasons why learners are frequently absent. A phenomenological descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using structured interviews with ten teachers from Aring Elementary School in Badoc, Ilocos Norte. Data were analyzed with the aid of NVivo to capture recurring themes and significant insights.

Findings revealed that absenteeism was largely attributed to health-related concerns, family circumstances, lack of learner motivation, financial difficulties, and unfavorable school environments. In response, teachers implemented various strategies such as continuous professional development, open communication with parents, provision of remedial and support sessions, use of positive reinforcement, and collaboration with community leaders. These approaches demonstrated how teachers adapt their classroom practices and create inclusive spaces that encourage students to return after prolonged absences.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights for schools and policymakers on how to address absenteeism through community-based and learner-centered interventions. It underscores the importance of empowering teachers to exercise professional judgment in managing absenteeism while fostering a supportive environment where every child feels welcome to learn.

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Introduction

There are always some students in every classroom who are frequently absent yet noticeably missed. These “invisible learners” compel teachers to adjust their teaching strategies, manage classroom dynamics differently, and ensure that learning opportunities remain equitable. While it may be easy to focus on the students who are present, absenteeism leaves lasting effects that go far beyond the empty chair. It disrupts the flow of lessons, lowers teacher morale, and widens the gap in academic performance and engagement. Teachers are often left to balance moving forward with the curriculum while also helping absent learners catch up—a task that can feel inequitable and may weaken the overall learning environment.

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The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) underscores that irregular school attendance has long been a challenge, one that was further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. In low- and middle-income countries, prolonged absences were often linked to health concerns, digital inequality, and financial hardship. Students who are chronically absent are more likely to experience learning loss, diminished motivation, and increased risk of dropping out. Beyond academics, absenteeism also robs students of valuable peer interactions crucial for cognitive and socio-emotional growth (UNESCO, 2023). This is echoed by Lindsay and Hart's (2022) meta-analysis in the *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, which reinforced earlier findings by Gottfried (2014) that absenteeism diminishes lesson effectiveness, lowers teacher morale, and weakens the classroom's sense of community.

Research further indicates that students with high absenteeism rates miss out on collaborative learning and new experiences. Consequently, teachers are compelled to adopt reactive measures such as reteaching lessons, adjusting assessments, and offering additional support. Evidence published in *Educational Researcher* highlights how chronic absenteeism forces educators into repetitive cycles of reteaching and differentiation, which heightens stress and reduces job satisfaction (eSchool News, 2025). Similarly, national surveys show that roughly 82% of educators reported professional dissatisfaction in the aftermath of the pandemic, with absenteeism and its associated workload strongly linked to burnout (Pew Research, cited in *Time*, 2024). While these strategies help bridge student learning gaps, they also place a heavy burden on teachers, increasing the risk of exhaustion and reducing instructional effectiveness.

In response, Kearney, Gonzálvez, and Graczyk (2021) proposed a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to address absenteeism. Their model emphasizes relational teaching, consistent student check-ins, social-emotional learning (SEL), and early interventions based on attendance monitoring. These strategies not only re-engage absent learners but also contribute to safer, more supportive classrooms. However, gaps in the literature remain. While prior studies (e.g., Gottfried, 2014; Thornton et al., 2022) have extensively explored the causes and academic consequences of absenteeism, far fewer have examined its impact on teachers—particularly the increased workload and stress tied to individualized support and classroom adjustments. Recent reports (Pew Research, 2024; eSchool News, 2025) affirm that absenteeism contributes significantly to teacher burnout, underscoring the urgent need for further inquiry into how schools can support both learners and educators.

With these concerns in mind, the present study set out to explore how teachers navigate the realities of the "invisible learner" and maintain classroom balance despite frequent absences. Specifically, it investigated how teachers adjust their classroom management, instructional delivery, and emotional support to keep all students engaged in the learning process. The study also aimed to identify effective, teacher-tested strategies that schools can adopt to strengthen inclusivity and resilience in classrooms where absenteeism is a persistent challenge.

Review of related literature

The purpose of this related literature is to contextualize the research within the body of existing knowledge, and support the necessity of this study. It offers methodological insights, a theoretical foundation, and aids in preventing repetition. It also advances comprehension, strengthens the researcher's credibility, and helps formulate hypotheses.

Students' absenteeism

Around the world, student absenteeism is becoming a bigger problem. It is often caused by a mix of health, emotional, and environmental factors. Finning et al. (2019) say that emotional problems like anxiety and depression are a big reason why teens and young adults refuse to go to school and miss a lot of school. These mental health problems have become more obvious in the past few years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which made students more stressed and less interested in school.

Socioeconomic factors are also very important for getting students to show up. Gottfried and Gee (2017) found that students from low-income families are more likely to skip school because they can't get there, don't have enough food, or live in a home that isn't stable. These things make it hard for students to go to school every day, and a lot of the time, they are things that students can't change. This shows how important it is to give systemic support.

Also, a bad school environment and bad relationships between teachers and students can make students less interested in school and cause them to miss more days. Liu et al. (2022) said that students are more likely to skip classes if they don't feel connected to school or supported by their teachers. Bullying, feeling like you don't belong, and strict discipline rules can make students want to leave even more. This shows how important it is to have schools that are welcoming and focused on students.

Teacher strategies

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that the most effective approach for educators in addressing the issue of student absenteeism involves the utilization of real-time data alongside a tiered system of supports. The three-tier model proposed by Attendance Works, which includes basic routines applicable to all students, targeted check-ins to address emerging issues, and intensive individualized plans, provides educators with a structured framework for increasing support as student absenteeism escalates. The 2023 evidence guide published by the U.S. Department of Education indicates that the implementation of these practices, in conjunction with early-warning dashboards that provide real-time notifications to educators regarding emerging patterns, has been associated with significant enhancements in both student attendance and academic achievement. The implementation of MTSS strategies at Keansburg High School in New Jersey, which included real-time attendance tracking and relational supports, resulted in a significant 20% cumulative reduction in chronic absenteeism. Notably, half of the Tier 3 students were successfully reintegrated into regular attendance (Edutopia, 2023).

Talking to families is another important thing that teachers should do. Robinson, Lee, Dearing, and Rogers (2018) found that sending parents cheap, personalized letters cut chronic absenteeism in grades K–5 by about 15%. Later, big tests with texts and phone calls got the same results (Rogers & Feller,

2018). The same federal guide says that a teacher visiting a student's home even once lowers the student's risk of missing school for a long time by 21%. This shows that reaching out to people in a proactive way and building relationships is better than sending out truancy notices.

Finally, to keep students who miss class learning, both relational and instructional changes are needed. Gottfried, Kim, and Fletcher (2024) used data from across the country to show that teachers who intentionally build warm relationships with their students and new teachers who are trained in relational routines have the biggest effect on reducing absenteeism for students who are close to the chronic threshold. The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Mid-Atlantic suggests that teachers post lessons in learning-management systems, offer remote check-ins, and send printed packets for younger students. Early evidence from the district shows that these hybrid options help students who are absent catch up without making achievement gaps bigger (McCutcheon & Dyer, 2024).

Classroom management practices

Educators facing a significant number of students who frequently miss classes must continuously adapt their instructional strategies to maintain student engagement and ensure the continuity of lessons. Recent research conducted by Zhang and Murphy (2023) indicates that significant school absenteeism among students not only disrupts the continuity of lessons but also alters the dynamics within the classroom and the relationships among students. This disruption poses challenges for educators in upholding behavioral expectations and fostering a cohesive learning environment. As a result, there is a growing emphasis on the implementation of flexible lesson planning, scaffolded instruction, and differentiated tasks by educators. This approach aims to facilitate learning for both new and returning students while minimizing any negative impact on others. In support of this assertion, the research conducted by Gottfried, Ansari, and Woods (2024) indicates a correlation between elevated levels of student absenteeism and diminished job satisfaction among teachers. This phenomenon occurs as absenteeism interrupts the flow of classroom activities and detracts from the professional fulfillment experienced by educators.

Another part of proactive classroom management is creating a welcoming and supportive environment that encourages students to come to class every day. According to Allen and Sims (2022), a positive school culture with strong relationships between teachers and students, praise for student effort, and emotional safety can greatly cut down on chronic absenteeism. Students are more likely to stay interested even after being absent for a long time if teachers make their expectations clear, celebrate attendance milestones, and make interactions personal. Also, tools based on technology are helping teachers deal with absenteeism. Liu, Lee, and Gershenson (2022) say that using digital learning platforms for sharing lessons, keeping track of attendance, and talking to students and teachers helps prevent learning loss by keeping students who are absent connected to the curriculum. Students can rejoin at their own pace with platforms that let them access class materials and check in with each other at different times. This keeps the class going and causes the least amount of disruption for the rest of the class.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the primary causes for student absenteeism and the teacher strategies and classroom management practices amid student absenteeism.

Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. **What are the common causes of student absenteeism as observed by teachers?**

2. **What strategies are used by teachers to support the learning needs of frequently absent students?**

Research methodology

This chapter presents the research design, sources of data which includes the locale of the study, population and sampling, data gathering instrument and data analysis including its ethical standards.

Research design

A phenomenological research design was employed in this study. Specifically, this study adopted a descriptive phenomenology that focuses on understanding lived experiences and contextual nuances. This approach allows an in-depth exploration of the struggles faced by teachers and the strategies they apply as responses. These would offer a holistic view of their insights and unexpected themes to deal with complex absenteeism of student scenarios.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted at Aring Elementary School in Badoc, Ilocos Norte, a public school staffed by ten teachers handling various grade levels. This site was selected as the study locale because of its documented challenges with student absenteeism, making it an appropriate setting to investigate how teachers manage classrooms and implement strategies to address the difficulties posed by frequently absent or “invisible” learners.

Population and sampling

The population of this study comprised the ten teachers of Aring Elementary School in Badoc, Ilocos Norte. Employing a phenomenological approach, the research sought to explore and articulate the lived experiences of these teachers in managing classrooms in the context of student absenteeism. Because of the small population size and the direct instructional responsibilities of all teachers, the entire teaching staff was invited to participate, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Data gathering instrument

This study used an interview questionnaire with open-ended questions to gather detailed insights from teachers about their strategies and classroom management practices amid student absenteeism. The questions focused on areas such as teaching methods, behavior management, and student engagement. Interviews were conducted at the school, recorded with consent, and used to understand the teachers' experiences in managing absentee learners.

Data gathering procedure

The data were collected through interview questionnaires and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved reading the teachers' responses carefully, identifying key ideas, and grouping similar answers into themes. Important phrases related to their experiences in managing absentee learners were highlighted and organized. These themes were then reviewed and refined to clearly reflect the teachers' shared experiences and strategies. This process helped in gaining a deeper understanding of how teachers manage the invisible learner in the classroom.

Data analysis tool

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, following the updated approach of Braun and Clarke (2021). The process began with careful transcription and open coding to identify key patterns and insights from participants' responses. To enhance accuracy and transparency, qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo was utilized. Themes were developed through an iterative process that included member checking, peer feedback, and triangulation to ensure credibility. To minimize researcher bias, reflective journaling was maintained throughout the analysis.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully observed in this study. All participants provided informed consent after being fully informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. To protect the teachers' identities, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Data collected were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. The interviews were conducted with respect and sensitivity. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate review board, ensuring that all research procedures followed ethical standards.

Results and discussion

This section presents findings from structured interviews conducted with elementary teachers at Aring Elementary School in Badoc, under the Schools Division of Ilocos Norte, organized according to key themes identified during the interviews.

Table 1. Teachers' perceptions of the common causes of student absenteeism

Themes	Contributing sub-themes	Frequency
Theme 1: Health-related issues	• Frequent illness or chronic conditions • Mental health concerns • Poor nutrition and hygiene • Injury or physical disability • Lack of access to healthcare	• 4 • 7 • 1 • 2 • 1
Theme 2: Family-related challenges	• Parental neglect or lack of support • Family conflicts or domestic issues • Parental illness or disability • Childcare responsibilities • Poverty and financial struggles	• 9 • 2 • 1 • 1 • 10

Theme 3: Lack of motivation	• Lack of interest in academic subjects • Low self-esteem or academic confidence • Absence of recognition or encouragement • Teacher-student relationship issues • Peer influence and negative social circles	• 3 • 10 • 1 • 1 • 2
Theme 4: Socioeconomic factors	• Poverty and financial hardship • Lack of transportation • Child labor or work obligations • Inadequate school supplies or uniforms • Lack of access to technology or internet	• 10 • 4 • 5 • 8 • 10
Theme 5: School environment influences	• Negative peer relationships or bullying • Poor teacher-student relationships • Unsafe or unwelcoming school atmosphere • Strict or punitive discipline practices • Lack of extracurricular or enrichment opportunities	• 10 • 1 • 2 • 1 • 4

Source: Research data gathered from teacher interviews at [Aring Elementary School], 2025.

Theme 1: Health-related issues

Health-related issues came up as the first big theme in the structured interviews. They were a big reason why students at Aring Elementary School missed school. Teachers always said that students often miss class because of common illnesses like fever, cough, and the flu, as well as long-term conditions like asthma, allergies, or other health problems that come back over and over. These absences due to health problems often make it harder for students to keep up with their schoolwork and put more pressure on teachers to help them catch up. Along with physical illnesses, mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and emotional stress were also mentioned as reasons for missing school, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which made a lot of students more likely to have mental health problems. Teachers also talked about how bad nutrition and hygiene, especially among students from low-income families, can make them more likely to get sick.

In addition, injuries and disabilities, whether they are temporary or permanent, were mentioned as reasons why people do not go to school regularly, especially when getting around or getting to school is hard. Another important factor that was found was the lack of access to timely and affordable healthcare, which makes it take longer for students to get better and go back to school.

"Health problems are the main reason students miss school." (P1)

"Poor health and nutrition often cause students to be absent." (P7)

They can miss school for days at a time because of even small illnesses, and some families have trouble getting medical help right away. Rogers et al. (2017) backed up these findings by showing that health problems are one of the main causes of chronic absenteeism, especially in communities with few resources. Jacob and Lovett (2022) also stressed that schools that have health-focused programs like

wellness checks, hygiene support, and mental health counseling have seen a big rise in student attendance. These results show how important it is to remove health-related barriers so that all students can participate in class regularly and fairly.

Theme 2: Family-related challenges

The second theme that emerged from the interviews highlights the significant role of family-related problems in student absenteeism at Aring Elementary School. Teachers noted that these issues are often interconnected, creating a web of challenges that hinder students from attending school regularly. A recurring concern was parental neglect or lack of support. Some parents, preoccupied with personal struggles or unaware of the value of education, failed to prioritize their children's schooling. Family conflicts—such as separation, domestic violence, or emotional instability—were likewise identified as stressors that discourage students from going to class.

Another critical factor was the presence of a sick or disabled parent, which frequently compelled students, particularly older ones, to assume caregiving responsibilities that disrupted their studies. Similarly, some learners were tasked with caring for younger siblings in households where adults were either unavailable or unable to provide adequate support. Underlying many of these circumstances was poverty, which surfaced as a cross-cutting issue that amplified all other family-related difficulties. Financial hardship often meant insufficient food, lack of transportation, and the inability to purchase school supplies, all of which contributed to chronic absenteeism.

"Poverty makes it hard for students to attend school regularly." (P10)

"Family problems can keep students from focusing on their studies." (5)

The findings of this study are consistent with the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Gubbels, van der Put, and Assink (2019), which revealed that negative family circumstances—such as neglect, low parental involvement, and household instability—significantly increase the risk of school absenteeism. Their research underscores the critical need for strong school–family partnerships that adopt a holistic approach in addressing students' well-being. Furthermore, they emphasize the value of targeted support programs that respond directly to the root causes of absenteeism related to family challenges. Such initiatives not only reduce barriers to attendance but also help ensure that at-risk learners are not left behind academically and socially.

Theme 3: Lack of motivation

The third significant theme that emerged from the interviews was lack of motivation, which teachers identified as a major contributor to absenteeism at Aring Elementary School. Many teachers observed that students often expressed boredom or detachment from their studies, reflecting a general disinterest in school. This disengagement was frequently connected to issues of low self-esteem and poor academic confidence. Learners who consistently struggled with lessons or received low grades tended to internalize these experiences as failure, which gradually discouraged them from participating in school activities.

Teachers also emphasized that the absence of recognition and encouragement played a role in diminishing students' drive to attend classes. Strained teacher-student relationships were another factor, with some students perceiving unfair treatment, lack of attention, or limited understanding from their teachers—circumstances that contributed to emotional disconnection. In addition, peer influence was found to be a significant driver of absenteeism. Students frequently chose to skip classes to spend time with peers who were also disengaged or struggling with behavioral challenges.

"Low self-esteem can make students lose interest in attending school." (P10)

"Negative peer influence often leads to frequent absenteeism."(3)

These findings align with the study of Ekstrand (2017), which highlighted that students often become absent when they feel emotionally or motivationally disconnected from school. Such disengagement typically occurs when learners feel undervalued, lack a sense of belonging, or fail to perceive the relevance of education to their lives. The results therefore underscore the importance of fostering supportive and inclusive classroom environments, where students receive both academic and emotional support to sustain their interest, confidence, and regular attendance.

Theme 4: Socioeconomic factors

The fourth major theme that surfaced from the interviews was socioeconomic factors, which teachers identified as a significant driver of student absenteeism at Aring Elementary School. Many students come from low-income families, making it difficult for them to attend school regularly. Teachers explained that families often struggle to cover basic school-related expenses such as transportation, meals, and uniforms, leading to frequent absences. The lack of reliable transportation was particularly challenging for students living in distant barangays or areas with limited access to public transit.

In some cases, students were also burdened by child labor or household responsibilities, such as helping earn income or caring for younger siblings. These competing demands often required children to prioritize family survival over education. Teachers further noted that some students attended school without proper uniforms, supplies, or hygiene essentials, which not only reflected resource scarcity but also contributed to feelings of embarrassment and disengagement from school activities.

The challenges intensified in the context of blended and remote learning, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital inequality became a pressing barrier. Students who lacked gadgets, stable internet, or a conducive home environment for studying were more likely to miss lessons and gradually lose interest in school.

"Some students really want to go, but their families can't afford to send them every day." (P2)

"Lack of transportation makes it difficult for students to attend school." (P6)

These observations align with the findings of Kearney and Graczyk (2020), who reported that students from low-income backgrounds face heightened risks of absenteeism due to structural barriers such as

poverty, transportation difficulties, and unequal access to technology. Their study underscores the importance of strengthening school-based support systems, equitable resource allocation, and proactive family outreach to reduce absenteeism and promote inclusive participation.

Theme 5: School environment influences

The fifth theme that surfaced from the teacher interviews was school environment influences, which play a critical role in shaping students' attendance at Aring Elementary School. Several teachers emphasized that a negative or unwelcoming school climate can significantly contribute to absenteeism. Among the most pressing concerns was bullying and poor peer relationships, which left some students feeling unsafe, isolated, or excluded, ultimately discouraging them from coming to school.

Another recurring issue was the student–teacher relationship. Learners who felt misunderstood, unsupported, or unfairly treated by their teachers were more likely to disengage and skip school. Beyond interpersonal factors, the physical and emotional environment of the school also surfaced as important. Teachers noted that overcrowded classrooms, insufficient facilities, and a lack of inclusivity created conditions where students felt disconnected and less motivated to attend regularly.

Disciplinary practices also came under scrutiny. According to teachers, overly strict or punitive approaches, particularly when unaccompanied by positive reinforcement, risked alienating students rather than encouraging better behavior. Furthermore, the absence of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities limited students' sense of involvement and inspiration, making school attendance feel like an obligation rather than a meaningful experience.

"Bullying can discourage students from coming to school." (P8)

"An unwelcoming school atmosphere leads to more absences." (P4)

Garcia and Weiss (2019) emphasized that a supportive and welcoming school climate significantly increases student attendance, whereas negative peer interactions, limited opportunities for engagement, and overly harsh disciplinary practices are closely associated with higher absenteeism. Their findings underscore the importance of fostering safe, inclusive, and enriching school environments where students feel valued and a sense of belonging. Such conditions not only encourage regular attendance but also strengthen students' overall connection to their learning community

Table 1: Teacher strategies to support the learning needs of frequently absent students

Themes	Contributing sub-themes	Frequency
Theme 1: Implementation of remedial and catch-up sessions	• Individualized or small-group instruction	• 10
	• Use of peer tutoring or study buddies	• 10
	• Flexible scheduling for remedial sessions	• 4
	• Integration of missed lessons into ongoing activities	• 2
	• Use of simplified or condensed learning materials	• 2

Theme 2: Use of positive reinforcement to encourage attendance and participation	• Recognition of improved attendance • Verbal praise and encouragement • Classroom roles or privileges as motivation • Reward systems and incentives • Celebration of milestones	• 5 • 10 • 10 • 8 • 5
Theme 3: Establishing open communication with learners and parents	• Regular parent-teacher conferences or consultations • Use of communication platforms (e.g., SMS, messenger, call logs) • Creating a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere • Involving students in attendance discussions • Providing feedback and updates on learner progress	• 2 • 5 • 10 • 10 • 10
Theme 4: Collaborating with community leaders for student support	• Referral to barangay officials or youth leaders • Community awareness campaigns • Assistance with basic needs and resources • Shared monitoring of student attendance • School-community engagement activities	• 2 • 1 • 10 • 3 • 10
Theme 5: Engaging in professional development to address student absenteeism	• Attending seminars and workshops on inclusive education and attendance strategies • Peer learning and experience sharing among teachers • Training in Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health Support • Professional collaboration with guidance counselors or social workers • Continuous learning through online courses and modules	• 10 • 6 • 4 • 5 • 10

Source: Research data gathered from teacher interviews at [Aring Elementary School], 2025.

Theme 1: Implementation of remedial and catch-up sessions

Teachers at Aring Elementary School have come up with a main way to help students who are often absent with their schoolwork: by holding remedial and catch-up sessions. Teachers stressed how important these sessions are for helping students get back on track after being absent for a while. One common method is individualized or small-group instruction. This lets teachers focus on specific areas where a student needs to improve without having to keep up with the whole class. Teachers also said that peer tutoring or study buddy systems, where classmates who were there for the missed lessons help and encourage the student, worked well. Flexible scheduling is often used for remedial support sessions so that they can happen before or after school, during lunch breaks, or on days when there isn't a lot of

school work. Teachers also practice how to add missed lessons into current lessons so that students can review what they learned without feeling like they are falling behind. Another useful tip is to use simplified or shortened learning materials. These give students content that is focused on the most important ideas from the lessons they missed.

"Combining remedial and catch-up sessions can really help the student understand what they missed." (P2)

"Having a study buddy makes it easier for absent students to catch up on lessons they missed." (P6)

It gives them a chance to catch up and feel good about themselves again. Research by Tran, Nguyen, and Hallinger (2020) backs up this idea. They found that individualized remedial strategies, especially when used flexibly, are very effective at getting students back on track with their learning and reducing the long-term academic effects of missing school. Their research shows how important it is to use responsive teaching methods to help all students, no matter how often they come to class, succeed in school.

Theme 2: Use of positive reinforcement to encourage attendance and participation

At Aring Elementary School, teachers have discovered that encouragement often works better than punishment in addressing the subtle but persistent challenge of absenteeism. Positive reinforcement emerged as a central strategy in re-engaging students who were frequently absent, helping them ease back into the rhythm of school life. Even small gains—such as completing a full week of attendance or making consistent daily efforts—were seen as meaningful progress that deserved recognition. Simple gestures like verbal praise, affirming words, or assigning classroom roles and responsibilities gave students a renewed sense of confidence and belonging. By transforming learners from passive outsiders into valued contributors, these practices helped rebuild motivation. Teachers also introduced reward systems—stars, stickers, or handwritten notes—that highlighted effort and perseverance. More than just marking milestones, these acts turned classrooms into supportive communities where showing up was celebrated, not overlooked.

"By using positive reinforcement to encourage attendance and participation, we help the student become more willing to go to class because they feel valued and involved." (P1)

"Rewarding improved attendance encourages them to value being present in class." (P5)

This observation is supported by the findings of Guryan, Ludwig, and Morris (2021), who showed that consistent positive feedback and even simple, low-cost rewards can significantly boost students' interest in school, particularly in under-resourced settings. Their research reinforces what teachers at Aring Elementary School already practice and believe: when students feel seen, valued, and genuinely praised, they are more likely to return to class with motivation rather than avoid it.

Theme 3: Establishing open communication with learners and parents' discussion

Absenteeism, as teachers at Aring Elementary School see it, is not a problem to be solved alone—it is a shared concern that calls for partnership. They have come to understand that reaching out to parents and caregivers is one of the most effective ways to support students at risk of falling behind. Through regular conversations, whether face-to-face or via technology, teachers and families work together as a team, united by the goal of keeping children present, engaged, and learning.

"Having open communication with students and their parents can really help students go to class." (P10)

"A supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere encourages students to come to school without fear."(P3)

Students respond when they feel noticed. Teachers at Aring Elementary School shared that many learners begin to show up more consistently once they know someone is checking in on them—whether it's a teacher, a parent, or both. That simple sense of being seen can make a child feel accountable and cared for at the same time. This insight echoes what Maier, Daniel, and Oakes (2019) found: strong, consistent communication between schools and families not only improves attendance but also deepens student engagement and academic performance. Their study supports the idea that when parents and students feel like genuine members of the school community, showing up each day is no longer just a personal battle—it becomes a shared commitment.

Theme 4: Collaborating with community leaders for student support

When students are absent often, the impact goes beyond the classroom—it affects families and the whole community. Teachers at Aring Elementary School have recognized this reality and extended their efforts beyond school walls by working hand in hand with barangay officials, youth leaders, and local organizations. Referrals to barangay and youth leaders are one effective strategy, as these figures often have stronger ties to families and can address problems with sensitivity and influence. Community awareness efforts such as home visits, neighborhood posters, and advocacy talks also help spread the message that education is a shared responsibility.

Teachers noted that support with basic needs—like food packs, uniforms, or transportation fares—through local partnerships has made a tangible difference in helping students return to class. Coordination with local leaders who check in on children in their neighborhoods and relay updates to the school also ensures that student monitoring becomes a collective task. At the same time, school-community events such as clean-up drives, feeding programs, and cultural activities strengthen the sense of belonging among students and families.

"Working with community leaders can really help students go to class." (P7)

"Assisting with basic needs helps remove barriers that keep students from attending." (P4)

When these efforts come together, students begin to feel that education is not just the teacher's concern but the community's priority. This finding echoes the study of Sheldon and Epstein (2019), who showed that schools with strong community partnerships enjoy higher attendance, stronger family engagement, and better student outcomes. Their research highlights a simple truth: when communities and schools work side by side, absenteeism stops being an isolated issue—it becomes a shared mission that draws students back into the heart of learning.

Theme 5: Engaging in professional development to address student absenteeism

Teachers at Aring Elementary School are not just responding to the persistent problem of absenteeism; they are also embracing their role as lifelong learners, committed to finding ways to bring every child back into the classroom. Professional development has emerged as a vital strategy, with teachers actively joining seminars and workshops on inclusive education and attendance interventions. These opportunities have helped them adapt their teaching so that students who are frequently absent are still given opportunities to learn.

Beyond formal training, peer learning and collaboration through Learning Action Cells (LACs) and informal sharing of classroom experiences have become important avenues for growth. Teachers exchange practical strategies and insights, strengthening a culture of collective problem-solving. Some have also pursued knowledge in socio-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health, enabling them to respond with greater empathy to students who struggle silently. Professional partnerships with guidance counselors and social workers extend these efforts, ensuring absenteeism is approached from a multi-disciplinary lens. For many teachers, online courses and flexible modules have also become essential, providing updated strategies for student engagement, trauma-informed teaching, and long-term attendance support. As one teacher noted, "The more we know, the better we can help our students come back and stay."

This dedication to continuous growth reflects what Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan (2020) found: that targeted, ongoing professional development has a measurable impact on teacher effectiveness, student engagement, and sustained attendance. In practice, this means teachers are better able to reach even the so-called "invisible learners"—those whose presence in school is inconsistent but whose effort and potential can still be nurtured.

The study identified key causes of absenteeism, which include health issues, family difficulties, low motivation, socioeconomic barriers, and negative school experiences. Illness, poor nutrition, domestic conflict, poverty, transportation problems, and bullying surfaced as common obstacles. In response, educators implemented concrete strategies such as remedial sessions, positive reinforcement, open communication with families, active community involvement, and continuous professional growth. Together, these approaches foster equity, rebuild trust, and engage the wider community in supporting student retention.

"Participating in or engaging in professional development can be a big help in getting students to come to school." (P9)

"Sharing experiences with fellow teachers gives me new ideas to address attendance issues." (P8)

The results align with the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), which emphasizes early intervention and layered support tailored to diverse student needs. They also echo Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, highlighting how learning is shaped by relationships with peers, families, and communities. At a policy level, the findings resonate with the goals of the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, which stresses learner-centered, inclusive, and community-driven education. Finally, they reinforce global calls from UNESCO, UNICEF, and OECD to address absenteeism not just as a school issue, but as a shared societal responsibility.

Ultimately, the study shows that empowered and well-supported teachers can turn student absence into a catalyst for collective action. By addressing root causes, sustaining family and community partnerships, and committing to professional growth, educators are not only bringing students back into classrooms but also reshaping schools into more inclusive, resilient, and compassionate learning spaces.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that absenteeism is shaped by many interconnected factors—ranging from health concerns like frequent illness and poor nutrition, to family challenges such as conflict, caregiving responsibilities, and economic hardship. Low motivation, peer influence, and the weight of poverty further complicate students' ability to attend class regularly. Within the school itself, issues such as bullying, overly strict discipline, and limited opportunities for engagement also add to the problem.

To address these realities, teachers implemented layered responses: remedial sessions, positive reinforcement, open communication with families, and close collaboration with community leaders. Professional growth also played a key role, as teachers sought training in inclusive education, socio-emotional learning, and mental health support to better respond to their students' needs.

Anchored on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), these approaches highlight that absenteeism cannot be solved by the school alone—it requires shared responsibility among teachers, families, and the community. By reframing attendance as a collective priority, schools can create more supportive environments where every child has a fair chance to stay engaged and succeed.

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